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ABSTRACT

Black and white photographs, descriptive text, and participants' comments profile the New Brunswick schools' experiences with the integration of special and typical elementary school students in regular classrooms. The text defines integration; describes problems with segregation; provides a rationale for integration; discusses learning in integrated contexts; and describes roles of teachers, students, and parents. In conclusion, four parents of exceptional children briefly describe their experience with integration or present their attitudes toward their special needs children. (RH)

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Integration Means

All our Children Belong

Student Services Branch
Department of Education
Fredericton, New Brunswick
1987

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Acknowledgements

This book is intended to open a window on New Brunswick schools so that you, the reader, can see how a social change—integration—has moved a province.

You will read what teachers, students and parents have to say about their experience. At inservice meetings and during informal conversations, in written communications and video interviews, these people shared their thoughts and feelings about integration. Their insights, gained through experience, will influence further practice.

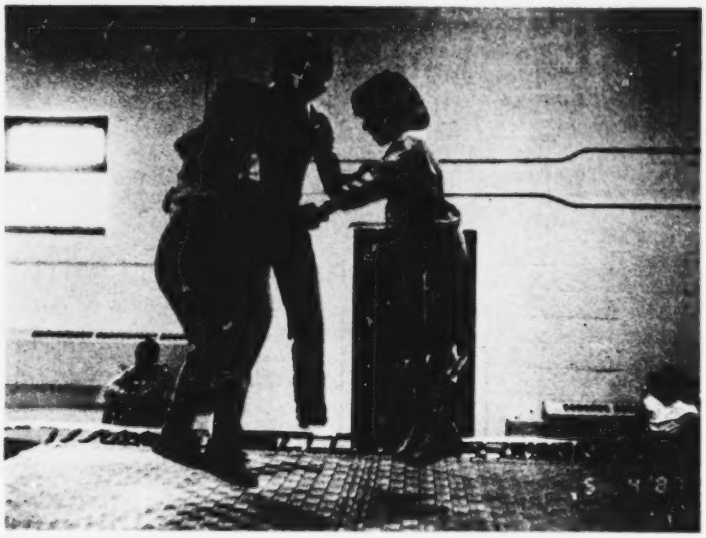
Our special thanks to the contributors named below, and to others whose words were captured but whose names were not recorded.

Thanks to the sensitive photographers, mostly teachers, who contributed pictures.

Thanks, too, to the many other people who are working to make integrated education a reality throughout our province.

Integration is an appropriate focus for educators. A warm, supportive, welcoming school brings out the best in every child and adult.

Integration means all our children belong.



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What is Integration?

"Integration is all people. All working and talking together."

The past few decades have brought great changes to New Brunswick students with special needs. They have gone from having no school privileges—to attending segregated schools and classes—to participating actively in regular, public schools. These changes have come about through the concerted efforts of teachers, administrators, parents and service organizations working in collaboration with government departments. Integration, in school and beyond, has grown from a dream to a practical reality.

What is integration? Here is how some New Brunswick educators define it:

"Integration is the placing of all children together in a working, happy relationship."

"Giving every child and adult the opportunity to participate fully in society."

"Special and typical students together in a naturally proportioned community."

"Integration is automatic acceptance of a child as a student in school—with equitable opportunities."

"Integration is providing a child (person) a neighbourhood environment in which he or she feels comfortable and has a sense of belonging *and* contributing."

"Integration is letting a child have a chance."

"One school system for all children with all individual needs being met in a warm and creative environment."

"Integration is, #1: all children learning, working, playing together—in and out of school, and #2: support to make #1 happen."

"Integration to me means providing normal, real-life situations for all real kids."

Problems with Segregation

In the past, in many communities, children with special needs were brought together in small, self-contained classes so that they could receive individual attention from teachers. The children in some of these classes shared a particular problem or disability. In other classes, students did not have the *same* needs but were brought together because each one had special, challenging needs of some kind.

Over the past two decades parents and educators alike have begun to feel that separating and congregating exceptional students does not work to their advantage. Individualized help can be as difficult to provide in a small, self-contained class as in a regular classroom because each member of the class may require a great deal of help, especially if the students are not well equipped to serve as positive models and helpers for one another.

Further, the task of preparing students with special needs for the world beyond school was difficult to accomplish in a segregated setting. Like all parents, parents of children with special needs hope that their children will become participating and contributing members of the community. They hope they will have friends, an independent living environment, and useful work to do. Special education teachers worked very hard to equip their students for the real world, concentrating on such things as self help and communication skills as much as on academics. But often they found that their students didn't have much motivation to use these skills. Many students had no friends in the school outside the special class, no connections with the people who would one day be their neighbours, employers and fellow workers.

> *"It all makes sense to me now," remarked a teacher of a separate class. He had just returned from a visit to an integrated high school and was standing outside his own classroom. "We've spent so much time teaching them how to get along in public, but we've been keeping the public locked out—right next door."*

In the separate classes, students' special needs could be attended to, but the needs they shared with other children often went unmet: the need to belong, to contribute, to have friends.

Adults sometimes forget how much children learn from one another. This is especially true for children with special needs; they have a special need for friends who can share the fun as well as the pain of childhood, friends who can help them romp and laugh, friends close enough in age to communicate by touch as well as words, friends—so that they can feel needed as well as needy.

If a child who cannot walk unaided is placed in a class with others who cannot walk or move, who will push his wheelchair or steady his walker? Not a friend his own age.

It will not help a child who does not speak to be put into a class with other silent children, no matter how loving or skilled her teacher. Even more than other children, she needs to be in countless daily situations where people talk, whisper, tease, tell jokes, question, compare, negotiate, explain and share secrets. The teacher can set the stage, but it is the children who supply the talk and the action, the context in which language thrives.

One School System For all Children

We are finding that having one, integrated education system is the best way to help *all* of our children reach their potential. We have begun the process. The relatively small number of children who would previously have been in separate schools and classes are joining regular classes.

Integration does not signal the end of special education. Children with special needs do need special help—and sometimes other children do, too. Integration is a better, more realistic approach to special education: providing support services, as needed, within the context of the regular class.

Nor does integration mean that we no longer need special education teachers. Many teachers who formerly taught in segregated settings are now working with classroom teachers to help ensure that the integration process goes smoothly and that children receive the special help they may require. These helping teachers, usually called resource and methods teachers, are a resource for classroom teachers, principals and children. Thus teachers, too, are being integrated and, like the students, are learning together.

Learning Together

This province has a valuable and growing resource: educators, students and parents who have lived and worked in integrated settings. These people can talk concretely about the integration process, not just about what they would like to have happen, but about what actually is happening. They don't have all the answers (they never will, because each student and each teacher is different), but they've made a very promising start. Because they have been generous about sharing their experience, educators, students and parents who are just starting out can feel more confident and secure.

> *"Last year I was sitting here in a workshop just as frightened as you are—no, terrified! And now look at me: not only did I survive the year, I'm an expert!"*

At first we thought of integration primarily in terms of the children with special needs; they were the ones being integrated. Now we know that is only part of the picture. When children with special needs were in separate schools and classes, the "regular schools" were deprived of their gifts and contributions, which made for less variety, less diversity; in fact, everyone was segregated.

> *"All kids need the opportunity to participate and give to others. 'Regular kids' have been deprived of the chance to know* all *types of different people—so have most of us."*

Now when teachers talk about the advantages of integration, they're thinking about all their children.

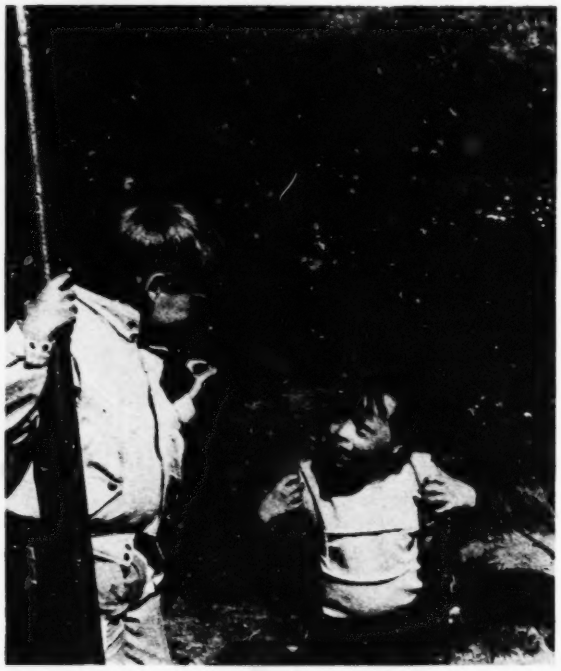
> *"It's good to have exceptional children in the regular class because the other children know that they are regular children just like them, and after leaving school they will all have to live together in the real world."*

Learning from Children

"The kids were actually teaching me."

One of the most important discoveries—or rediscoveries—educators are making is that *children* are very effective teachers.

"It's funny, she does work better with the other children, and I use that quite a bit in my teaching."

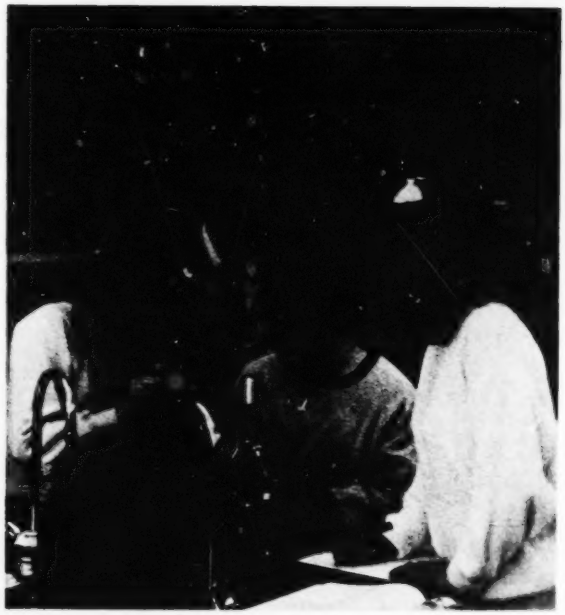


Just the example of other children can have a tremendous effect on a youngster whose previous teachers have all been adults.

"He wants to get out his math book when everybody else gets out their book and do something on that page. Of course he's not doing the same thing, but just that he's there and doing it."

The experience of being responsible for one's own work is new and motivating.

"And he really doesn't want somebody sitting beside him either, another adult helping him all the time. He wants something there he can do on his own. I think he feels that real accomplishment and he feels success that he's done that page on his own."



When teachers learn from students, everyone benefits.

"A lot of the time I get overly technical, like when I was talking with him I might refer to the fine adjustment knob or the coarse adjustment knob on the microscope, and the other kids in the class were always reminding me: 'No, the big *knob or the* small *knob.' "*

Classmates are eager to be teachers and friends. Older children, like this grade 5 student, also make enthusiastic and effective tutors for younger children.

"I got him to know this book and I think if you asked him he'd probably know it—some of it—right off....

"Sometimes, if it's quite warm out, we'll go outside to the soccer field and work out there with little pine cones that we find, or we'll just stay in and I'll just get these planes and trucks that are in the math room....

"He is friendly, but sometimes he can be stubborn, just like anybody else. When he's stubborn, you can't do a thing with him, you might just as well leave him....

"Once I started reading with another kid and he got real jealous. He don't mind once in a while—but all the time—he don't like it....

"I know that I'm doing a good job with him. I try!"

Teaching a fellow student improves the *tutor's* academic performance at least as much as the tutee's. Teachers value growth in confidence and self esteem as highly as academic gains; they know the two go together. It is not only academic subjects that are being learned.

> *"The big change I see in him is socially; socially is a big thing. You saw how well he gets along with the other students. He is willing to try just about anything that they do. When he first started he'd want to be right with me. At noontime I wouldn't have left him, but he's quite happy to be there now. He's sitting with his special friend. She doesn't do too much for him, she makes him do his own work, but she's very special to him and she's very good to him. He loves her. He writes her love notes."*

The children with challenging needs are not the only ones who gain.

> *"Another thing that's worked out very well, other children have really taken responsibility for her, too. When the lines come in from recess and noon hour, if she hangs back you'll always see a student go and get her and bring her in—without being asked. They all feel responsible. I certainly think they're learning to be tolerant. They're seeing that there are children who do have special needs and that they belong in the classroom, the same way the other students do."*

Parents value these positive traits in their children.

> *"One of the things I'm hearing from parents in my class is that their own child has learned a tremendous amount of patience for other children. Their social skills are perhaps a little stronger than they would have been had they not been exposed in their first year of school to a child who did not have language."*

And parents are seeing that the combination of cooperative activity and individualized work characteristic of many integrated classrooms is of benefit to all children.

> *"Integration can be a catalyst for other things, like working and planning more individually with gifted children and many others who have been out of the mainstream."*

Making it Work: Teachers

Responsive teachers have found meaningful ways for children with special needs to participate in the academic and social life of the classroom. When making individual plans, their focus is first on the child's strengths and interests.

> *"Even though he can't read, he participates in a reading group. He can discuss stories after hearing them read and enjoys the feeling of participating and belonging."*

> *"My student is a very good listener but cannot get things down on paper, so I discuss things with him orally."*

> *"If we are doing work on a certain topic, my student will help by finding the pictures we need from magazines."*

> *"I don't expect the same academic work from her as from other students. However, I do expect her to do her best."*

As children have developed confidence, so have teachers.

> *"Initially, the staff tended to be very apprehensive, but as they made adjustments and realized, 'Yes, this does work' and 'Yes, they can fit into my classroom' and 'No, there aren't the problems I anticipated there might be,' then things seemed to become more positive throughout the school."*

> *"I think we're learning a lot about working with all children from working with children like John."*

> *"I was totally against it last summer. Now I'm on my soapbox in the staffroom. I'm upset about kids who are still not integrated."*

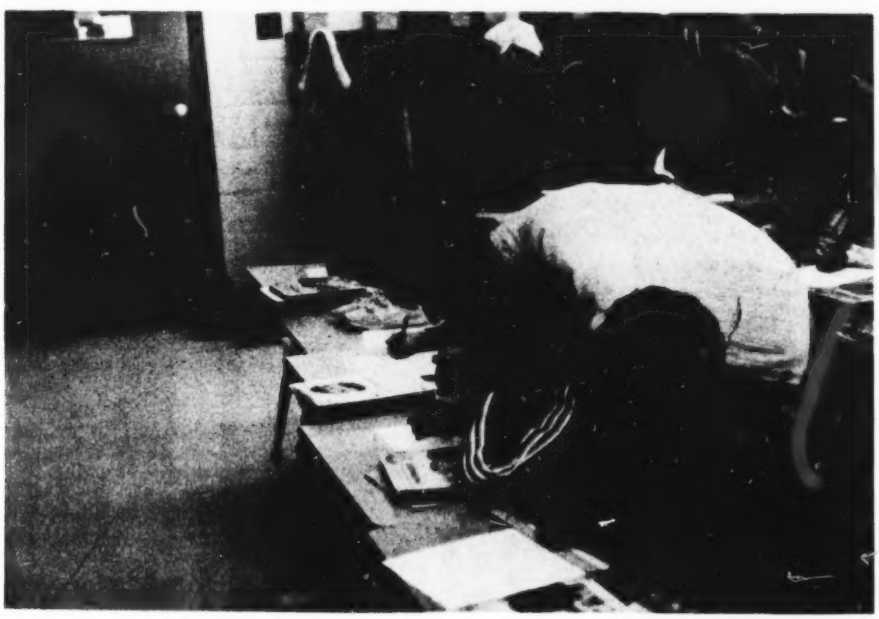
Classroom teachers have not had to learn a completely new way of teaching. In this case the teacher's determination and knowledge of children worked wonders.

> *"It's been the most rewarding experience of my teaching career. Last year I observed him in his special class and told the principal, 'There's no way I can take this child!' The first month was really chaotic. I decided I had to make it work. I walked him back to his seat a thousand times if it took a thousand times. Now if people come into the room, they have to ask, 'Which one is he?' "*

Certainly integration has demanded hard work and dedication from teachers—but so does all teaching.

> *"I've really enjoyed the year. I must say, in the fall when I heard I was going to have her in my class, I was a little nervous. But I'm really glad that it's worked out and that she's been in my room."*

> *"For myself—I've found it to be a good challenge, a rejuvenating challenge. It excites me."*



Making it Work: Students

"Maybe he wasn't learning what we were learning, but then not everyone gets the same thing out of every class anyway."

Students who were previously in segregated schools have adjusted cheerfully and usually remarkably smoothly to their new surroundings.

"I got lots of friends here."

"I like the school." ("What do you like about it?") "Math! Gym!"

For some, it has meant the opening of new vistas, new opportunities for learning.

"We study about plants and animals in Biology. Yesterday we went on about food. We have labs where we see different blood types. Without looking in the microscope it looks awful small. You put it in the microscope and it's awful big. It's amazing!"

Given a climate of acceptance—principals and teachers who set a positive tone—classmates have been matter-of-fact and accepting.

"This year in Grade 12 a young fellow was in my class. He was always smiling and he was a great addition to the class. We had some people come in and ask us what we thought and we all felt he should be there because he was learning something. Maybe he wasn't learning what we were learning, but then not everyone gets the same thing out of every class anyway."

Students who become accepted, participating members of integrated schools, will go on to become accepted, participating members of integrated communities—the kind of communities we are beginning to see in New Brunswick. The experience of being befriended by others helps each of us go out and *be* a friend to someone else.

"I give them good luck this year for graduation."

"Like I say, around here it's a really good program, it works and no one teases anybody. It's a good set-up."

The reward for teachers is the progress they see in children.

"He was accepted right away by the other students, but he did not attempt to move toward them. This has occurred only recently and is very exciting for me to see."

"Her attention span has increased greatly."

"He can sit still much longer and no longer runs around the class."

"His mother told me: he works harder, he has attained many new skills and he enjoys the classroom."

Looking Ahead

"We've jumped on the bandwagon—now we have to learn to play the instruments."

Most of those involved in integrating our New Brunswick schools feel pleased about how things have gone thus far; they are satisfied that we have made a good beginning. But they are not complacent.

"We think we can do a better job at integration. More integration in the community as well. There's always room for improvement."

"If it weren't for teacher attitudes, the willingness to share and help each other, this wouldn't have worked out as well as it has. It's a team effort; it has to be a team effort, and if you get that team effort I think you've got a good chance at success."

Parents

Parents have been key players on the integration team. They have opened doors for their children by insisting that we get to know them as individuals, as children to be loved and included.

"At the Christmas concert she was right up there singing with the others. And I know her mom was very pleased. Apparently when she went to another school they had attendants standing right behind them. I think her mom was just pleased to see that she was just part of the class. I was directing from the floor, but the children were all up on stage. And she did beautifully. She did all her motions. It was called Kittens *and they were all dressed as kittens and she looked adorable."*

It is appropriate for parents to have the last word. We need to pay attention to their stories, to listen with our hearts.

Kara

Integration has meant many new and exciting challenges for Kara, her family, teachers and classmates. The results have been all positive and rewarding. Two important factors for success are a co-operative working relationship between family and school and an individualized education plan based on her strengths and needs. Kara has just blossomed during her two years in Junior High School. She enjoys attending classes alongside her peers, eating lunch in the cafeteria with her friends, the excitement of winter carnival week, cheering on the school team at basketball games, monthly school dances, sock hops and all other events related to Junior High. During summer holidays, Kara attends Bible School Camp with school friends, enjoys the beaches, pools, shopping, eating out—fun things all teens like to do.

Integration is giving Kara opportunities for a high quality of life as close to normal as possible in our own community. The possibilities are endless as we continue to plan how to give her the best chances to grow in every way.

Cheryl Grant

Mandy

As Mandy's mother and advocate, I would not change a thing. She has brought me more joy and awareness of life itself than most individuals will experience or learn from a textbook in a lifetime. Life is a learning experience!

Life is filled with many prejudices and it almost seems unfair that some of this is directed to those who are the most needy of our compassion and assistance.

As a parent I will strive to ensure *all* children are given the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. . .

I feel that the greatest gift that we as parents can strive to give our children is the opportunity to learn, to communicate and to be accepted socially in their community. This gift will require adjustments, effort, patience and understanding.

In this growth process known as integration all individuals involved will experience pain, joy, failure, success, defeat and victory. It will be an important lesson of life in their education. We must be tolerant, patient as individuals. As parents we must be advocates of these endeavours.

Recreational hobbies and interests outside of the school system are important in order for integration to be obtained. I also believe that in order for integration to be successful we must ensure that the proper supports are accessible. For example: speech pathology, behaviour consultants, teacher's aides, resource teachers, etc. These tools are necessary in the education of all children, not just the disabled. Integration should not be an issue, but a fact of life!

Alene Steinbach

This One's For You, Kid

I look into those clear blue eyes
And they tell me that your Spirit
Is whole and healthy
Your little nose is perfect
I'm glad
I fret over the constant flow
of drool from your mouth
And the flat side of your face
I wish your hair would go the other way
So that bump on your head wouldn't be so noticeable
I love watching your hands
while you try to do things
How you can make those crooked fingers move
To think I once worried
About Jonathan's overbite
And Sarah's flat feet
And now I have you and
I wonder What in the world will I do with you
Then you give me one of those famous looks that say
Hey Mom! It's me—Daniel
I'm a Person
I have worth and I will find a place where I belong
I have strengths and I have weaknesses
I can do things—if you'll Let me
If you'll help me—if you'll Push me

And I look back and smile thinking
I do Love You and I think you're wonderful
Just the way you are
But more important than that
I Love you enough to allow you to choose
What you shall become.

Lois Carson

My Dream

At a meeting for parents of Special Needs Children, we were asked "What is your Dream for your child?" I never had a Dream for my son Daniel, who has special needs, nor for my two other special children. I always felt that they should have the dream and I should give them the opportunities for it to come true. After thinking about it—yes I do have a Dream for Daniel—a very simple Dream. I dream of Daniel taking an apple to his teacher, of packing his lunch for school, of seeing him in a school play, and of him bringing home his report card. These are very ordinary things for most parents, but to the family of a medically fragile child, these are dreams that will bring unexplained Joy.

And I have another very special dream for Daniel, that is coming true right now. While at Play Group, Daniel's friend Evan sits with him (in case Daniel should fall over or hurt himself) while the attendant is helping to prepare snack. You should know that Evan is three years old. I hope that this Dream will continue—that when my son is in high school, his friends will say "Daniel doesn't need an attendant all day—we'll help him with his lunch—we'll make sure he gets to classes—we'll help him to get on and off the bus. We'll take him to the school dances and basketball games. Simply because he is our friend and we care about him."

Lois Carson